

Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors 835-00

**5-Year Strategic Plan
FOR THE FISCAL YEARS 2022 – 2026**

Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors 835-00 5-Year Strategic Plan, FY 2022 – FY 2026

1. Our Mission

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors (Board) purpose is to provide for the regulation and practice of counseling as well as the use of the title "Licensed Professional Counselor" and "Provisional Licensed Professional Counselor" to ensure the protection of the public health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the State of Mississippi.

2. Our Philosophy

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors is committed to the continued safeguard of the public health, safety, and welfare of Mississippians. The philosophy of the Board is to adhere to the highest professional standards and to indiscriminately enforce licensing and regulation of any person who presents himself/herself to the public as a licensed professional counselor or psychotherapist and who offers professional counseling or psychotherapy services to individuals, groups, organizations, corporation, intuitions, government agencies or the general public.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

Statewide Goal #1.: To protect Mississippians from risks to public health and to provide them with the health-related information and access to quality healthcare necessary to increase the length and quality of their lives.

Relevant Benchmarks #1: *Access to Care*

- Number of health professional shortage areas
- Number of practitioners needed to remove health professional shortage area designations, by type of practitioner
- Percentage of population lacking access to mental health care
- Percentage of population lacking access to community-based mental health care

Statewide Goal #2.:

To create an efficient government and an informed and engaged citizenry that helps to address social problems through the payment of taxes, the election of capable leaders at all levels of government, and participation in charitable organizations through contributions and volunteerism.

Relevant Benchmarks #1: *Cost of Government*

- Total state spending per capita
- Number of government employees per 10,000 population

Relevant Benchmarks #2.: *Government Efficiency*

- Administrative efficiency: Expenditures on state government administrative activities as a percentage of total operational expenditures
- Average wait time for state government services
- Regulatory efficiency: average length of time to resolution of documented complaints to professional licensing agencies
- Number and average cost of regulatory actions taken, by regulatory body and type of action
- State dollars saved by providing government services online (e.g., document retrieval, issuance of new business permits, license renewal)

4. Overview of the Agency 5-Year Strategic Plan:

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors has targeted five priorities for the next five years. A step license, Provisional Licensed Professional Counselor, was established in Mississippi, effective July 1, 2018. While this new law greatly benefits the access to quality mental health counseling and psychotherapy, it significantly impacted the policies and procedures and workflow of the Board's office. Based on this new path to licensure for counselors, the Board recognizes the need to ensure the long-term viability of the office and to take proactive steps to establish a state position to serve as administrative and licensing support to the Agency. Despite the diligent efforts of the Board's Executive Director, and only employee, the workload generated by the passage of the new law has increased dramatically and continues to increase as more professionals find themselves required to obtain proper licensure in order to obtain employment in the State of Mississippi. With the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the Board released Proclamation(s) to suspend Rules and Regulations to allow licensees from other states to continue to provide counseling services to existing clients that chose to "shelter in place in Mississippi" or return home to Mississippi to care for family members via telehealth by requiring them to register with the Board office instead of requiring licensure in Mississippi. Many licensees from bordering states have, also, chosen to apply for Mississippi licensure in order to provide continuity of care to clients and to continue to grow their own practices with the use of telehealth, since the Board's Proclamation only related to "existing clients, prior to March 16, 2020." Consequently, the Board proposed rules revisions to provide the least restrictive means necessary, while also protecting public health and safety, for a licensee to practice Distance Professional Services. This pandemic created increased calls and emails, not only from out of state licensees, but more frequently from Mississippi licensees trying to understand the requirements to continue to provide clients with counseling services via telehealth. To prevent delays in licensing or hearing of complaints, the volunteer Board met 19 times in FY 2020. The increased number of meetings places much more responsibilities on a staff of one; therefore, the Board requested funding for one full-time administrative and licensing support position for FY 2020, which was not funded. The Board will try to supplement with a contract worker for FY 2021 with the intent to establish a state position to serve as

administrative and licensing support beginning FY 2022. The Board foresees the continual increase of applicants for licensure via this new path yet does not know how COVID-19 may continue to affect or impact the Board and its operations.

Secondly, the Board will continue to enhance communication and licensing options through its online database of Licensed Professional Counselors and Provisional Licensed Professional Counselor. The Board will continue to utilize this secure online database to further develop “Board Books” to allow for virtual Board meetings, remote application review, and streamlined Board communications. This enhancement will decrease meeting costs and office costs, decrease processing time of license renewals thereby promoting efficiency and convenience to licensees, decrease processing time of application review, provide more timely means in getting qualified applicants through the licensure process to allow greater access to professional counseling and psychotherapy, provide immediate deposits of funds into State Treasury account, and streamline communication systems with licensees and applicants.

Thirdly, the Board will continue to regulate the practice of counseling in Mississippi by addressing its legal and ethical concerns by conducting numerous hearings involving denied licensure, practicing without a license, and disciplinary hearings of complaints to ensure the protection of the public health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Mississippi.

Fourthly, the step license allows the Board to more closely monitor supervisees (P-LPC) as they complete the three thousand (3,000) supervised hours of counseling in a clinical setting under direct supervision by a Board approved supervisor bearing the Licensed Professional Counselor-Supervisor (LPC-S) credential. The plan for supervision with the LPC-S is to be approved by the Board prior to any actual performance of counseling on the part of the supervisee. The Board will strive to implement a quarterly evaluation process for each Supervisee by their Supervisor. Any supervisee, after meeting the requirements specified in Board Rules and Regulations, may petition the Board for licensure as a Professional Counselor. This step license will further protect the public from unlawful counseling practice and ensure protection of public health, safety, and welfare of citizens of Mississippi with access to quality counseling and psychotherapy from well monitored supervisees through their licensing process by enforcing qualification standards or all levels of licensure.

Fifthly, the Board developed and implemented a jurisprudence examination in FY 2020 to ensure applicants and licensees are staying abreast of the Rules and Regulations of the Board, *Miss Code Ann. § 73-30-1, et. (Rev.1985)*, and the Board adopted *American Counseling Association Code of Ethics*, The Board will monitor the competency, effectiveness, and excellence of the Licensed Professional Counselors through monitoring of continuing education for renewal of licenses. As well as the administration of juris prudence examination.

5. Agency’s External/Internal Assessment

- 1) As more professionals find themselves required to obtain proper licensure in order to obtain employment in the State of Mississippi, the LPC Board incurs additional expenses. However, the ability to license counselors in turn means more revenue from collection of fees to cover expenses.

- 2) Increased propensity of the public to file formal complaints and the Board's pro-active nature to pursue persons practicing as a counselor without proper license as well as hearings for denial of licensure of persons not meeting requirements impacts the budget necessary to pay expenses of Board members, hearing officers, and court reporters for participation in hearings as well as takes time away from the Board's ability to review license application files during monthly face to face meetings.
- 3) Increased amount of time required by volunteer Board members impacts the expediency of Board action.
- 4) Automated documentation by interactive website will impact personnel and Board productivity. Maintaining agency website in line with recommendations from the PEER committee will impact expenses for the continued web design, data migration, and on-going management. Changes in technology has enhanced the productivity of the Board outside of face to face meetings and even provided opportunity for virtual meetings. Videoconference Board meetings reduces the Board's meeting/travel expense.
- 5) Agency is reliant upon collection of fees.
The Board is a 100% Special Fund Agency with one full time employee. The implementation of a step license, the increase in number of administrative and informal hearings, the online database management, and the website enhancements has necessitated the agency's need to establish a state position to serve as administrative and licensing support for the agency. Fees collected by the agency for licensing of Licensed Professional Counselors will cover the added expenses (retirement, health coverage, life coverage, FICA) of the additional state PIN.

The duties of the five appointed Board members, made up of representatives from each Congressional District plus one at-large member with an elected Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary/Treasurer, are to develop guidelines and implement procedures for granting state licenses to professional counselors, including required candidate testing and investigating all forms of formal complaints about the professional, ethical and legal practices of licensed professional counselors in the State of Mississippi.

The Board is only required to hold two regular meetings per year as pursuant to statute, however, the growing number of applicants with the implementation of a step license, increase in number of complaints and other administrative needs makes it necessary to meet more often in person for 1-2 days and via video/teleconference if the need for supplemental meetings arises. (The Board met 19 times in FY2020.) These meetings allow the Board to make decisions on requests, provide direction for the Executive Director, review applications, hear complaints, set forth policies and rules and regulations as needed, and provide educational programs for Licensed Professional Counselors and Board qualified supervisors (LPC-S) via presentations at state and regional conferences. At these meetings Board members evaluate the progress made toward established goals and objectives and make changes when appropriate. With the advancements in technology and online licensee database, the development of "Board Books" and the purchase of iPads for each of the 5 board members, Executive Director, and the Attorney to assist with Board Meetings, Compliance Reviews, and Hearings of Licensed Professional Counselors regulated by the agency will increase Board and personnel productivity and efficiency.

The Board, through its regularly and special called board meetings, discusses agency performance, priorities for the upcoming quarter and any additional issues that may affect the agency and/or the practice of Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of Mississippi and addresses deficiencies in the process. The Board continues an on-going process of evaluating all aspects of duties and responsibilities under the Board’s mandate. This includes contracted services, standards set forth in the Rules & Regulations, Statutes, and standards/processes for license renewal.

COVID-19 could have potentially affected collection of license renewal fees for FY 2020; however, license renewals were comparable to other years with minimal non-renewal. Unfortunately, the Board does not know what the future may hold if the pandemic continues. License application fees could increase if more out-of-state licensees seek to provide services in the state via telehealth or license renewal fees could decrease if licensees become unemployed.

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Measures by Program

6.1 Agency Goals by Program

Program 1: Licensure & Regulation

GOAL A: Issue licenses to individuals who satisfactorily meet set standards and qualifications (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-1 & 73-30-7 & 73-30-9 & 73-30-21*)

Objective A.1. Develop and impose standards which must be met by individuals in order to receive a license as a professional counselor or a step license as a supervisee

- Outcome:* Qualified Licensed Professional Counselors
- Outcome:* Change in number of complaints against Licensed Professional Counselors
- Outcome:* Change in number of persons not meeting minimum requirements for licensure
- Efficiency:* Average cost per administrative hearing for Board travel, administration, and other fees

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide a comprehensive application that requires proof of good moral character and satisfactorily meeting minimum requirements to become licensed as a professional counselor

- Output:* Number of applications completed online
- Output:* Number of state and national fingerprint background checks received
- Output:* Number of complaints filed for persons practicing without a license or not practicing in a competent and ethical manner
- Output:* Number of qualified supervisees registered and monitored
- Efficiency:* Online access to application reduces office costs
- Efficiency:* Online access to application for review by the Board
- Efficiency:* Costs of Board travel, administration, and other fees for complaint hearings

A.1.2. STRATEGY: Board review and approve each individual based on acceptable completed applications and supporting documentation

Output: Number of applications received

Efficiency: Cost per application reviewed based on costs of Board travel and office expenses offset by fee

A.1.3. STRATEGY: Implement juris prudence exam to reflect applicant and licensee's knowledge and understanding of Rules and Regulations, applicable statutes, and Board approved Code of Ethics and any changes in Board policy, federal mandate or state mandate

Output: Number of exams administered

Efficiency: Cost per exam administered

Objective A.2. Develop and implement educational program to train Licensed Professional Counselors who are Board qualified supervisors

Output: Number of LPC-Supervisors

Output: Number of LPC-Supervisor applications submitted

Outcome: Equip Supervisors to provide acceptable supervision for persons seeking supervision hours to meet experience requirements for licensure

Efficiency: Cost of speaker(s), training materials, facility; administrative

Efficiency: Cost of Board travel, administration, and other fees for training

A.2.1. STRATEGY: Provide on-going training to Board qualified supervisors

Output: Number of Board qualified supervisors participating

Output: Number of complaints filed for persons practicing without a license or not practicing in a competent and ethical manner

Efficiency: Cost of speaker(s), training materials, facility; administrative

Efficiency: Cost of Board travel, administration, and other fees for training

GOAL B: Renew licenses biennially for individuals who satisfactorily meet requirements (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-29*)

Objective B.1. Review and assess qualifications for renewal of Licensed Professional Counselors

Outcome: Qualified Licensed Professional Counselors

Outcome: Decrease in number of complaints against Licensed Professional Counselors

Outcome: Change in number of persons not meeting license renewal requirements

B.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide a comprehensive renewal application that requires proof of good moral character and satisfactorily meets continuing education requirements for a Licensed Professional Counselor

Output: Number of renewals applications received
Output: Number of state and national background checks received
Efficiency: Online access to renewal forms and continuing education reporting reduces office costs and increases customer service
Efficiency: Decreased processing time of license renewals
Efficiency: Immediate deposits of funds into State Treasury account
Explanatory: Costs reduced through online renewal and payment; associated fee offsets costs

B.1.2. STRATEGY: Track compliance with continuing education requirement

Output: Number of licensees utilizing online CEH reporting log
Efficiency: Administrative costs to process and report CEHs
Efficiency: Cost to review online reporting
Explanatory: Online tracking and reporting of continuing education reduces office cost to review and process

Require 24 Continuing Education Hours (CEHs) per biennial renewal for Licensed Professional Counselors

Six (6) of the twenty-four (24) each biennial renewal period must involve topics in professional ethics or legal issues in the delivery of counseling services

Require 6 Continuing Education Hours (CEHs) per annual renewal for Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors

Two (2) of the six (6) must involve topics in professional ethics or legal issues in the delivery of counseling services

Limit CEH to pre-approved providers

GOAL C: Regulate and enforce the laws governing Licensed Professional Counselors and Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-1 & 73-30-13*)

Objective C.1. Establish procedures to ensure compliance with standards, laws and rules

Outcome: Uniform qualifications of Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors
Outcome: Change in number of complaints
Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors

C.1.1. STRATEGY: Update state statute when necessary to reflect changes in Board policy, federal mandate or state mandate.

Output: Board reviews on-going basis
Output: Board proposes changes to state statute through legislature
Efficiency: Costs of Board travel, report preparation, legislative education

Objective C.2. Regulate and enforce state laws and rules

Outcome: Uniform qualifications of Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors

Outcome: Change in number of complaints

Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors

C.2.1. STRATEGY: Communicate changes and/or updates to state rules and regulations when necessary

Output: Number of notifications posted on website

Output: Number of direct mail pieces

Output: Number of email notifications

Output: Number of Board presentations

Efficiency: Online dissemination of information reduces costs

C.2.2. STRATEGY: Monitor best practices by participation in the national meetings

Output: Board member and Executive Director attend National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) meeting yearly

Output: Board member and Executive Director attend American Association of State Counseling Boards yearly

Efficiency: Cost of attendance

Explanation: National Board of Certified Counselors pays all travel costs for two Board members and one staff member to attend the NBCC meeting

C.2.3 STRATEGY: Monitor best practices by participation in the state association meetings

Output: Board members attend state association (Mississippi Counseling Association and Mississippi Licensed Professional Counselors Association) conferences

Output: Board invited to present at conference

Output: Active participation of state association liaison in open Board Meetings

Output: Board members attend regional meetings of the state association

Output: Board members present at regional meetings of the state association

Efficiency: Costs of attendance and travel for Board meeting

Explanation: Costs of audio-visual needs for presentation covered by association

Objective C.3. Conduct complaint investigations and hearings as needed

Outcome: Uniform qualifications of Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors

Outcome: Change in number of complaints

Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors

C.4.1. STRATEGY: Follow established statute, rules, and policy for investigating any complaint against a Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Professional Counselor, or someone practicing without a license or applicant who has been denied licensure

Output: Number of complaints registered with the Board

Efficiency: Cost of investigation of complaint

Efficiency: Cost of administrative hearings of complaint or denials

C.4.2. STRATEGY: Take disciplinary action on licensees when it is determined it is necessary

Output: Number of complaints investigated by the Board

Output: Reduction of number of Professional Counselors

Efficiency: Cost of investigation and court costs of action